

If farmers are the backbone of the economy, then it is fractured

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Different Idea: Subbaian in his farm at Kanakkan thottam, Irugur, Coimbatore

All human toil is for the mouth, yet the appetite is not satisfied says the Bible. This is true in agriculture too. Our politicians shout, preach from platforms that farmers are the backbone of the country's economy, but in reality, the backbone lies fractured and our politicians are just not bothered. Their attitude is to throw the produce from the broken bone in the garbage dump and import from the U.S. or Australia, says Mr. R. Subbaian, of Kanakkan Thottam in Coimbatore district.

Polluted

Both the soil and water in Mr. Subbaian's field became polluted due to the chemical waste seepage from nearby dyeing factories into the Noyyal river which runs across his village. Several farmers in the area started selling their lands and moved into the cities as the Government failed to check the pollution or clean up the river. Petitions, demonstrations, nothing seemed to work and the dyeing factories continue their pollution unabated, says the farmer. But unlike others, Mr. Subbaian did not sell his lands. The fields are my extended family and the birds and insects here are my relations, I wanted to stay on and do something.

During the course of my search for some information on what crops can be grown in these soils I came to know that Alfalfa (called Kudhirai masal in Tamil) grows well and I decided to cultivate it, he says. The farmer also took to multiple cropping to increase his income. Multiple cropping system is ideal for farmers as it is an effective method of avoiding risk of loss for the farmers. In case one crop fails, the farmers need not worry but can easily tide over the financial crunch through income from the other crops, explains Mr. Subbaian. In fact, much of the crop loss and farmers suicides happen only in areas where there is monocropping. Can you ever show me an instance of failure in multi-cropping? he asks.

Mainly organic

The crops are mainly grown organically as chemical farming proved to be a failure for him. Though I did chemical based agriculture nearly a decade back, all that it left was debts, which accumulated to nearly Rs. 30 lakh. One thing I realised in all my life as a farmer is that no government is really interested in helping farmers. The centre is willing to import anything from the West and these countries are ready to dump us with their produce. Our Ministers are only too willing to accept it with open hands at the cost of destroying the lives of crores of farmers' livelihoods, he says.

Becoming a debtor

How did farmers become debtors and suffer this wretched condition? Is it their own doing? Don't people in other professions take loans and default? But it is only when a farmer fails to make one or two payments that it becomes news, he fumes. He adds, the bank goes in search of him as though he is a terrorist. What happened to the people who swindled crores? That money could have been used to improve agriculture and production for many years. Is anybody bothering about this? The much trumpeted green revolution in reality turned out to be a farce and was not able to either sustain production or improve farmers' lives, according to him.

What is the use of only fields turning green? The lives of farmers must also turn green with money. Only then can we accept it as a revolution, says his son Kulandaivel. A sugarcane farmer goes through much hardship and it is the sugarcane mill owner who prospers. A paddy farmer remains poor throughout his life but the rice mill owner expands his mill or even buys two or three additional rice mills. Similarly it is not a cotton farmer but the buyer who flourishes. This is the ground reality. Even a 10-acre farmer is driven to sell his lands for getting money to finance his daughter's wedding, he emphasises.

Eye wash

According to the Mr. Kulandaivel the Government's campaign that rural India is shining and that too brightly, is just an eye wash. India no longer lives in villages; it lives in cities and cramped towns. The barren fields and almost empty streets in many villages with dilapidated homes are living proof of this, he concludes.

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